DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 814 FL 015 650

AUTHOR Duncan, Annelise M.
TITLE Liebes Tagebuch: Abroad at Last, But Let Me Tell You "auf Deutsch."
PUB DATE Nov 85
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Teachers of German (New York, NY, November 28-30, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; *Classroom Techniques; *Cultural Awareness; Diaries; *German; Learning Activities; Second Language Instruction; *Study Abroad; Summer Programs; *Vocabulary Development; *Writing Exercises; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

This paper describes techniques used by a German instructor with American students during a summer abroad program. Learning activities, both in and outside of class, concentrate on writing. The students keep logs and diaries, which force them to be aware of their surroundings and to participate more actively in the life around them. With the diaries as a basis, class discussion progresses through the events of an ordinary day, beginning with the alarm going off in the morning, and expands into less routine events and activities. The logs or diaries are submitted and corrected daily, with mistakes counted only if they are repeated after initial correction. Another writing exercise requires that students paraphrase or report on information found in newspapers, magazines, and advertising, and make cultural comparisons. A third assignment involves critiques of films seen at local theaters. A fourth approach uses a game in which students draw three pieces of paper from each of five piles containing nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbial phrases, and miscellaneous forms (pronouns, verbs, exclamations, proper names, etc.) in German. The students use what they drew to write a half-page story that is mysterious, dramatic, or funny. The exercises develop language and writing skills as well as cultural awareness, all of which are an essential part of complete language learning. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED268814

"THE WRITE WAY TO TACKLE GERMAN"
Pedagogical Session, AATG Annual Meeting
New York, 1985

„Liebes Tagebuch: Abroad at Last, But Let Me Tell You 'auf deutsch'"

Annelise M. Duncan
Trinity University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Annelise M. Duncan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FL015650

ABSTRACT

Liebes Tagebuch: Abroad at Last, But Let Me Tell You auf Deutsch...

The experience abroad, the opportunity--or necessity--to listen and to speak in every conceivable situation, is every language learner's dream--or nightmare. There, all will--or should--magically fall into place, objects in their proper order, verbs no longer struggling for position, adjective endings happening effortlessly. And, as the capstone of the experience, fluency!

This has always been the great lure of the oral/aural approach, and, with a little help from its friends, reading and writing, it is as valid as ever.

This paper shall discuss writing as an integral part of the daily vocabulary-and-structure-building process in the context of a summer program abroad. Suggested are a varity of assignments geared to different levels of language background but all utilizing fully the environment of the written as well as the spoken word. Common to all levels is the daily log or diary, collected and corrected regularly, by which individual progress may best be measured. New vocabulary and phrases are encouraged and mistakes are scored only if repeated after correction.

The inclusion of writing completes the immersion adding the dimension of learning on the most deliberate and structured level while continuously drawing on daily experiences in the language of the country.

Submitted by: Annelise M. Duncan
Box 139
Trinity University
715 Stadium Drive
San Antonio, Texas 78212

„Liebes Tagebuch: Abroad at Last, But Let Me Tell You 'auf deutsch'"

When taking students abroad, one of the primary objectives is exposure to the other culture, another, active daily involvement with that language, and, ultimately, literacy in all areas of expression and comprehension. The culture shock and the tongue-tied syndrome are easiest to overcome if attacked resolutely by so-called total immersion. First venturing out into the community alone to try one's luck in stores, restaurants, and on public transportation is akin to jumping into deep water as a non-swimmer. In both cases, it is reassuring to have a life guard nearby. The first few days of merely surviving in the new environment are a good object lesson. The time spent daily in the classroom abroad takes on practical significance. Here is the information center, the ever-ready dictionary, the cultural guide, and the occasionally needed reassurance. While regular courses are taught in their concentrated summer school format, adaptations are necessary for the special setting and purpose.

I begin each class every day with a question and answer session dealing with all the problems, linguistic or cultural, encountered the day before, from,"how do you say...?" to, "why did they look at me that way?" The students are required to come prepared for this portion of the class, and there is never a day without new questions raised by new situations. The fact that everything is unfamiliar turns even a street car ride or a grocery shopping trip into a potential adventure--the stuff that diary entries to set the world on its ears are made of. However, the scheming instructor who devises such a task may look in vain for scintillating revelations, great insights, or, at least in the

beginning, even a simple, coherent narrative of the most banal sort. Born with a telephone receiver attached to their ear and a television screen in front of them, today's students have little experience with the ancient and now almost extinct art of letter writing and learn of diaries only from gothic novels. Thus we begin with the most mundane: starting with the alarm going off, the shower, breakfast, we work our way through an ordinary day and its vocabulary. The diaries are turned in every day, and mistakes are marked and discussed during the following class period. To reap maximum benefit from this exercise, I found it vital to state and implement my rule from the outset that mistakes only count if repeated. It is well worth the additional trouble of keeping a running record for each student to be able to demonstrate and enforce that my corrections are made for future reference and may only be ignored at one's peril. After a couple of days, the system usually operates smoothly for all but a few hard-to-convince individuals. I find this method effective, more productive for the students and less frustrating than others I have tried. There seems to be more rapid progress and less backsliding, and there is, of course, the challenge to make <u>new</u> mistakes every time.

Having mastered the recital of daily trivia in short, simple sentences, more challenging goals have to be set and met, as we progress from the usual to the less repetitive. The daily breakfast is no longer admissable as a topic unless hot coffee landed in someone's lap, or the supposed soft-boiled egg is suddenly cracked from the inside. The emphasis on more variety prompts the students to take excursions for the purpose of reporting on them which, in turn, helps them to observe more consciously and to participate more actively in

life around them. The diary thus serves as a constant reminder of the main reason for being abroad and becomes a factor by which time and activities may be organized.

While observing the rules of grammar and learning the mechanics of good writing remains a somewhat tedious task, there are always some students who "discover" themselves, who find that they have a flair and a genuine facility for writing, even in the other language. They are the ones, of course, who most admirably fulfill the above- mentioned high-flown hopes of the instructor. Although most of the diary entries will remain on a more pedestrian level, the student who is concurrently reviewing grammar in his regular class, is finding daily application of his theoretical learning not only in his oral practice in the real world but in his daily writing as well. He may even discover that it can be as exhilarating to discover that dependent word order suddenly comes naturally as to understand at last a "native's" complicated answer to a simple question.

My second approach to writing during a summer program for intermediate and advanced students is that of paraphrase and reporting. It is based on the reading of newspapers, magazines and commercial advertising as it appears on billboards, in store displays, and on the packaging of merchandise. Here the student fill find it most helpful that he has been practicing a clear and simple style of writing. However, the difficulty of reducing a sentence of paragraph-length to a short, concise version without losing substance is considerable. The most obvious first hurdle is vocabulary in the areas of politics, economics, art, sports, fashion, etc. Since this is another good opportunity to build vocabulary, it is best to be selective in such assign-

ments by keeping usefulness and applicability in mind. Daily papers are generally easier to read and thus to paraphrase than newsmagazines like „Spiegel" which more advanced students may want to tackle. In order to ensure that new vocabulary is acquired and used repeatedly, each area of reporting may be assigned to an 'expert of the week' who searches out related stories for daily oral reports and a comprehensive written one at the end of the week. Especially popular among the students are human interest stories, personal ads and announcements, and all forms of advertising. The latter is also an introduction to a different type of writing, the artful manipulation of language not found in that form in literature. As in American advertising, the emphasis is on utmost brevity loaded with meaning, clever plays on words, and idiomatic expressions that defy translation. With the decoding of such messages comes the realization that far more is involved than language: a different sense of humor and allusions to cultural or political phenomena which require some inside information. Especially in reporting on advertising, students are encouraged to show cultural parallels and contrasts, and to detect American influence. In the face of the ever-increasing influx of American words into everyday German, I try to stem the tide and challenge the students to use no foreign words in their German writing, with the possible exception of 'blue jeans' and 'T-shirts.'

As all the above mentioned writing activities serve at least a dual purpose, so does the critiquing of films and plays. Frequent visits to the 'Kino' are a valuable exposure to the most accessible culture medium, and while the first reaction to the absence of subtitles may be mild panic, the students soon realize that the crutch was actually a hindrance, drawing attention away not only from the spoken word but from the upper two-thirds of the screen as well. The emphasis is on critical

viewing and the writing of a critique rather than a summary of plot. There are enough obvious differences even for the first-time American viewer of German films to provoke comparison. There are the dissimilarities of approach and purpose, the choice and treatment of subject matter, and the expression or withholding of emotions. Above all, there will be a confirmation of many traits and peculiarities observed in the real people of their everyday environment.

For the student who is gradually piecing together a coherent picture of the other culture, the variety of writing activities will ultimately provide a complete record of his experiences, and his growth in the language will not only be reflected in his greater fluency, but in the victory of black ink over red.

Although, ideally, the student should derive real satisfaction from his growing ability to communicate through writing, to manipulate words and structures instead of being their victim, it remains hard work. Even thinly disguised as a game, it is work. However, a change of pace is always welcome and may stimulate creativity. I call it 'German Roulette' and play it about once a week. Each student draws three folded pieces of paper from each of five different piles which contain nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbial phrases and 'miscellaneous' consisting of pronouns, proverbs, exclamations, names of well-known people, etc. The assignment is to write a story, one half page in length, which contains everything that was drawn, and the challenge is to make it mysterious, dramatic or funny. Imagination, albeit within the confines of grammatical structure, is encouraged to run rampant, and the best stories are read to the class.

It would be an exaggeration to say that all students become permanently and hopelessly addicted to writing. For many of them it will

indeed remain a chore. But for those who learn to express themselves well, it becomes a prized dimension. There is the satisfaction of having said something well, but the even greater one of having written it well. It is important to know how to think on one's feet but it is equally beneficial to be able to file and hone until a thought is put down permanently in its most concise and perfect form.

For myself, I found it helpful to have been fairly well-read in another language and to have been required to write a great deal before beginning to speak. This may be an odiously heretical statement, but that approach--not advocated hereby--agreed with my perfectionist bent. With enough structure and vocabulary stored up, I was able to open my mouth and speak intelligibly and coherently.

Some of my students who have endured my obsession for writing are still doing it--for fun, or because they like the idea of being published authors at an early age. Their stories and poems appear regularly in TAGS, the publication of the Texas Association of German Students, and extra credit is not even the motivation.

On the home campus, I work various types of writing into my courses on all different levels, beginning in the first semester. Since I assign the viewing of German films as a mandatory extra-curricular activity to all my classes, I am reading movie reviews all year long and enjoying it. Although I am convinced that it is a worth-while cultural exposure even for those who do not believe it, I am particularly thrilled when I find a potential 'writer' who also becomes enamoured of the German cinema.

It seems to me that writing and grammar are often neglected for similarly unacceptable reasons. Yet, if we can talk ourselves into some enthusiasm for the less popular aspects of our discipline, we may

be able to coerce our students into going along with the gag. One of the better arguments for writing has to do with retention, not only because there will always be the old 'Tagebuch' of that summer abroad, but because that additional process beyond the fleeting spoken word leaves an indelible image on paper, and on our mind.